

# Strategies to Support Inattention

People with or without a diagnosis of ADHD benefit from the following strategies. These strategies remain the same after a diagnosis.

## For concentration, organisation, and memory

### Strategies to aid attention

- **Goal setting:** Be motivated. Set yourself small goals to meet the overall one. Make them *practical and achievable* and make yourself complete them
- **Create novelty and interest:** Do things in a different way or place. Where you can do things you enjoy or find interesting, you will always do better
- **Use competition:** Introduce a competitive element (e.g., “*I’ll get this done in half an hour*”). Create urgency with the artificial deadline of a timer going off
- **Self-talk:** Talk to yourself – “*keep on task*”, “*finish this first*”
- **Breaks:** Take regular breaks before you lose concentration
- **Rewards:** Reward yourself immediately after you have achieved small goals
- **Planning:** Plan more taxing tasks for better times of the day (i.e., when your concentration is optimal)
- **Self-compassion:** Sometimes you will have lapses in attention. Try to be kinder to yourself about these and try not to worry what others might say

### Overcoming external distractibility

- Work in a quiet space. You may find it useful to listen to non-lyrical music / white noise, or use ear plugs
- Switch the phone to silent, checking for messages when convenient
- When working, remove visual distractions (e.g., cover windows, remove pictures and notice boards)
- Make your task more visually interesting (e.g., bright stationary, screens)
- Practise ignoring distractions. Decide “*this is what I’m doing now!*”
- Make a note for yourself such as ‘*focus, stop daydreaming*’ and put it somewhere you need to be reminded of this (e.g., your computer screen, your hand)
- **Deal with it now.** You can avoid forgetfulness, clutter, and procrastination by filing papers, cleaning up messes, or returning phone calls immediately, not sometime in future. If a task can be done in two minutes or less, do it on the spot, rather than putting it off until later
- Grant yourself some down-time for **positive distractions** and engage in activities you enjoy, especially those that do not require sustained mental effort or planning. Use this time to reward yourself for achieving goals, or for a day’s hard work

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## Overcoming internal distractibility

- Learn to notice and regulate your thoughts and notice when you are not concentrating
- Have a piece of paper or notebook ready for distracting thoughts that you do not want to forget
- Reward yourself for ignoring distractions

## Strategies to support memory

Difficulties with memory are often a result of difficulties with attention. You cannot remember something if you did not attend to it in the first place. You also need to have stored that information in an organised manner to help with retrieving the information when you need it. Some of these strategies may seem obvious, but if you are not used to using them, it can take time:

- Write things down e.g., lists / reminders, or use technology
- Diaries and calendars / calendar apps
- Clocks, watches and alarms
- Key finders / tracking devices



Mental memory strategies include:

- Repetition
- Making things visual e.g., messages into pictures
- Forming links or associations / linking new information with things you already know a.k.a. 'hooking'
- Mnemonics e.g., the colours of the rainbow - Richard Of York Gave Battle In Vain
- Triggers e.g., making a song / rhyme about the information

## Strategies to prevent losing things

- Have particular places: train yourself to always put items there (e.g., a box near the door for your keys and phone; a box in the kitchen for letters; a folder for all letters / medical information)
- Before you leave anywhere: "stop, look, check!"
- Minimise: the number of things you take around with you and avoid clutter

## Time management tips

- Become a clock-watcher. Use a wristwatch or highly visible wall or desk clock to help you keep track of time. When you start a task, make a note of the time by saying it out loud or writing it down
- Use timers. Allocate yourself limited amounts of time for each task and use a timer or alarm to alert you when your time is up. For longer tasks, consider setting an alarm to go off at regular intervals to keep you productive and aware of how much time is going by
- Give yourself more time than you think you need. For every thirty minutes of time you think it will take you to get somewhere or complete a task, give yourself a 'cushion' by adding ten minutes

We know this might be hard, and you may have tried these strategies before. You may need support from others to use these strategies. We recommend that you identify a suitable person (e.g., friend, family member, partner) to help you. Take each strategy one step at a time. After diagnosis, we offer a one-off strategy session with an Assistant Psychologist as well as a 6-week psychoeducation and support group with the psychology team in which we explore these ideas.

See the separate information sheet about opting in for post-diagnostic support.

